

Teacher Preparation

Rodriguez wanted to emphasize the power, and necessity, of revision in good writing, because he noticed that his sixth graders were often very tentative in their use of this critical step. For example, in drafts that featured descriptive writing, he found that many were providing only shallow details, when they were actually quite capable of solid, picturesque elaboration. He asked himself these two basic questions:

- How can I concretely support my students in adding more details to their work?
- How can I encourage students to collaborate as a tool for revising their work?

He knew from his knowledge of early adolescent development and general observations of his students that they tended to be visual learners who enjoyed creative expression, so he decided to combine his concern with their interest. When paired, this promised to make a successful lesson! He gathered art supplies, made a note on the board that students should bring their latest drafts to class, and then he mentally reviewed his plan.

Activity Starter

Rodriguez began his lesson by asking the students to pair up with a person sitting next to them. He then distributed blank paper and art supplies to each pair while they were getting out the drafts of their latest writing assignments.

He gave the students about five minutes to finish organizing themselves and to silently read each other's descriptive writings. Once they'd finished that, he asked them to read the same piece in a whisper-voice, concentrating on the images that they saw in their heads as they read. These images were, of course, shaped by the amount of description that their partners had written, so Rodriguez concentrated on these images (or the lack of them) as the focus for the lesson.

Once that was accomplished, he asked each individual to go back through their partner's writing and silently draw and color in the images found there. They were then instructed to use a pencil to "gray in" the images that they had to provide themselves because these details were missing in the writing. It was this gray area that provided the foundation for the next level of revision. Again, Rodriguez emphasized the importance of coloring in only what was actually written in the story; the rest was to be sketched in with pencil.

The papers were then returned to the authors, and the pairs conferenced about the writings and drawings. Rodriguez was pleased with the level of detail that followed in the next revision!